

Blackford Energy Park

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING PLAN

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REFERENCES

A - Pre-application enquiry from Aberdeenshire council and Scottish ECU ENQ/2024/1654

B - National Planning Framework 4, Part 2 - National Planning Policy, 13 February 2023

C - Aberdeenshire Council Community Wealth Building Strategy, March 2025

D - Aberdeenshire Council Community Wealth Building Energy Developments Charter, March 2025

INTRODUCTION

1. The following document outlines how Blackford Renewables Ltd intends to align the development of the Blackford Energy Park site with Aberdeenshire Council's draft Community Wealth Building (CWB) strategy and support its aims. Blackford Energy Park is a 500 MW battery energy storage system (BESS) project based in Blackford, Rothienorman, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. This document is written in support of the planning application to be submitted to the ECU for consideration.

2. This has been written, as advised by the pre-application enquiry, where reference was made to Aberdeenshire Council's Community Wealth Building Plan and the Energy Developments Charter which are currently in draft status at the time of issuing this report

3. This report aims to demonstrate that the proposals meet the policies referred to in the charter and in the Council's pre-application advice as much as possible bearing in mind their draft nature, and in particular Policy 11 and Policy 25 contained within NPF4.

Policy Background

4. "Policy 11 states that all energy and associated infrastructure development should maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits. Development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities."

5. "Policy 25 also specifies that development proposals which contribute to local or regional community wealth building strategies and are consistent with local economic priorities will be supported. This could include for example improving community resilience and reducing inequalities; increasing spending within communities; ensuring the use of local supply chains and services; local job creation; supporting community led proposals, including creation of new local firms and enabling community led ownership of buildings and assets."

6. Aberdeenshire Community Wealth Building Strategy is published in draft status on the local authority website, sets the objectives that developments should use to ensure the flow and retention of wealth is kept within the Aberdeenshire area.

7. The Energy Development Charter, which is also in draft status at the time of this drafting, provides objectives that regional energy projects should be designed and managed to so that the opportunities are maximised:

- Fair employment: promote jobs locally
- Proactive local and regional procurement
- Socially just use of land and property
- Equality: Addressing rural inequalities

The following section describes the measures that will be taken during each phase of the project to meet these criteria, and maximise the local opportunities.

PLAN

8. This section is broken down into the headings directed in the Planning Guidance.

9. For the purposes of this plan, the project is broken into three phases: planning, construction and operation.

Increasing spending within communities and ensuring the maximum use of local supply chains and services

10. The estimated total spend for each phase, planning, construction and operation is:

- £500,000 (total) for planning ,
- £350 million (total) for construction,
- £4 million (annual operations cost) during the operational phase

11. Local and national suppliers utilised, to date, during planning phase (pre-development):

- a. Black Hill Ecology Ltd, Aberdeen - conducted an ecological site survey
- b. Kaya Consulting Ltd, Edinburgh - conducted flood risk assessments
- c. DRM Consulting Engineers, Edinburgh - conducted geotechnical constraints survey
- d. AOC Archaeology Group, Midlothian - conducted an Heritage Impact Assessment
- e. Douglas land surveys, Dundee - conducted topographical survey
- f. Scott Hobbs Planning, Edinburgh - Provided planning application support
- g. The local shop and village hall in Rothienorman and local visitor accommodation.

12. As detailed in the PACR report and DAS, the site has gone through several design iterations, one of the considerations was reducing the land take of the project. This involved moving the access road and reducing the land area to the North and East so that they could be retained for farming and left in a regular shape to maximise efficiency of farming activities, avoiding awkward field sizes or curves. This in total has given back approximately 6.3 hectares of land back to farming use.

13. Local companies will be tendered where possible which provides the opportunity for a significant amount of wealth to be flow into and be retained within Aberdeenshire if successful in tendering.

14. The land will be leased from a local Aberdeenshire farmer who will importantly get a new diverse source of income from their land.

Improving community resilience, reducing inequalities and maximising local job creation

15. During the construction phase of the proposed 500MW BESS site it is anticipated that approximately one hundred temporary employment opportunities will be created and up to four permanent positions will be required during the operation. The construction phase is expected to last 18 months. The site has an expected operational life of between 25 to 40 years before being returned to agricultural and farming use. The site will be restored to equivalent agricultural grade and farmed for future generations.

16. The development of a BESS site involves highly skilled individuals, typically sourced internationally, particularly during the planning, installation and commissioning of equipment. However due to the level of development in the region, lots of larger international companies are basing teams in the area. This proposal is contributing to and supporting these jobs for larger companies investing in the area and which will have additional economic and social multiplier impacts – such as retail, leisure and educational facilities. There are also opportunities, some of which are listed below, which could lead to significant local employment:

- a. construction workers,
- b. electrical contractors
- c. fencing contractors
- d. landscapers,
- e. cleaners,
- f. plant operators,
- g. administrators,
- h. drivers.
- i. construction materials such as aggregate, cement, fencing,
- j. groundworks,
- k. landscaping,
- l. haulage,
- m. plant hire,
- n. site offices,
- o. security; fencing, lighting, CCTV.

There is no maximum threshold to the number of positions sought from the local population and Blackford Renewables Ltd intends to give local people equal opportunity to apply for all jobs or contracts relating to the construction and operation of the site. The best means of advertising jobs locally will be discussed with the Aberdeenshire Council but may include a local recruiting event and web resource to enable advertisement and applications.

17. Early engagement with Aberdeenshire Council will be sought to identify potential ways in which the development of the Blackford site can provide opportunities for the local young workforce. For example, exploring the possibility of work related learning experience, school partnering and recruiting apprentices.

18. Should it not be feasible for the project to support local education in this way, other initiatives with community benefit shall be considered. Blackford Renewables Ltd shall engage with Aberdeenshire Council to identify suitable, potential local schemes/projects/charities.

19. For the duration of the construction phase the site and its employees will require welfare support as suggested below, but not limited to;

- a. catering,
- b. accommodation,
- c. ablutions,
- d. cleaning,
- e. transportation of personnel,
- f. temporary site services i.e. fuel, water, power,
- g. welfare facilities.

20. Blackford Renewables Ltd will provide the opportunity for the Scottish Fire and Rescue service to visit the site, as required, to familiarise themselves with the technology and setup of the site. This will allow increased experience and understanding of BESS projects and lead to better outcomes for planning consultation and fire and emergency planning.

21. Contracts will not be tendered for the construction phase until after planning permission has been granted, so it is not possible at this stage to list details of local suppliers. However, it is planned to engage with local suppliers and contractors through a local 'meet the buyer' event organised with the assistance of Aberdeenshire Council, in order to raise awareness of the development and encourage local businesses to tender for the relevant works. Blackford Renewables Ltd would look to engage with those suppliers and contractors, that are compliant with industry standard regulations, within a 20 km radius of the site, this includes the totality of towns like Inverurie.

22. Once operational the site will be unmanned, with site visits required for operation and maintenance purposes. During this phase the following, non-exhaustive list, of services are likely to be sought;

- a. landscape maintenance,
- b. electrical equipment maintenance,
- c. transport, accommodation and catering relating to visits.

23. Similarly to the construction phase, a high proportion of the jobs during the operational phase will require specialist skills and qualifications. This will be tendered locally where possible. Additionally, lots of the maintenance is conducted by the Original Equipment Manufacture (OEM) and they are usually larger international organisations. This is usually conducted by regional teams who live and work in the area. Due to the level of development in the battery storage, renewable energy, and wider electricity transmission industry, this site is likely to contribute significantly to the ongoing creation and retention of jobs and incomes for the next 25 to 40 years in well-paying, specialised roles, such as maintenance technicians.

All job opportunities will be tendered to the local community businesses that meet the satisfactory criteria. If there is a lack of supply in the area it might lead to the creation of new firms.

24. When the time comes to decommission the site, there will be a similar opportunity to tender local construction and contracting firms to assist with the decommissioning and restoration of the site to its previous agricultural use. All equipment and materials will be reused and recycled where possible.

Creation of new local firms

25. As identified in the previous section there are a wealth of areas of opportunity, particularly in support of the construction and operation phases, where local business could meet the demand. In the event that such local businesses do not exist or require significant growth, Blackford Renewables Ltd may look to assist local businesses to form or expand in order to deliver the required services. Again, engagement for this would be coordinated through and follow on from a meet the buyer event and any assistance would be considered on a case-by-case basis for genuine proposals.

MONITORING

26. Subject to planning conditions, the plan as outlined above, will be monitored and reviewed upon completion of the construction phase, whereby a statement of the plan's outcomes and achievements will be drafted for Aberdeenshire Council. Further monitoring will be conducted as directed.

CONCLUSION

27. This Community Wealth Building plan has been prepared in support of the application for the construction and operation of a 500 MW BESS at Blackford Energy Park, as suggested in the pre-application consultation with Aberdeenshire council, and to the national and local planning policy aforementioned in the introduction section of this document.

28. This CWB plan describes how the project will meet the aims and objectives of Aberdeenshire Council's CWB Energy Developments Charter by creating and retaining jobs locally and in the region, proactively procuring materials and employment from regional firms with the appropriate experience or quality, or otherwise work with Aberdeenshire Council to develop those. It will bring flows of capital into rural communities, addressing the rural inequalities.

29. The intention of this plan is to ensure that the BESS site at Blackford is developed in line with the principles of community wealth building, ensuring the potential to benefit the local community is enacted to the fullest possible extent.

30. Blackford Renewables Ltd will continue to work with the appropriate section of Aberdeenshire Council to realise the plan as outlined above.